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New York

President: Mr. Essy . . . . . (Côte d'Ivoire)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Agenda item 103

Programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People: opening of the Decade

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/49/444, A/49/536)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/49/446)

The President *(interpretation from French)*: In accordance with its decision 49/408 of 7 November 1994, the General Assembly is meeting to mark the opening of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

The year 1993, which, under resolution 45/164 of 18 December 1990, was proclaimed the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, has made it possible for the international community to gain a better understanding of the specificity of the world's indigenous people and the problems they face.

The stir this created as well as the great interest shown virtually everywhere in the world in the context of the year has justified the need to go beyond mere symbolic manifestations and to envisage and establish a true programme for the promotion of indigenous people.

For this reason, the General Assembly, by its resolution 48/163 of 21 December 1993, decided to launch the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, which will be inaugurated on 10 December 1994. This plenary meeting of the General Assembly is being held against this backdrop. So, at the end of a preparatory period which lasted throughout 1994, the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People will devote itself to the implementation of a 10-year Programme of Action for indigenous populations.

Thanks to this Decade, the international community will now have an operational framework in which to strengthen cooperation in resolving problems facing indigenous people in areas as varied as the protection of cultural identity, economic development, human rights, the environment, education and health.

The draft resolution which is now before the General Assembly and which has already been approved by consensus by the Third Committee calls *inter alia* for an operational-oriented slant to the Decade on the subject of "Indigenous people — partnership in action".

I should emphasize that indigenous people are a vulnerable group in world society, one which has long been neglected. Their social structures and their lifestyle have suffered the repercussions of modern development. They have been under growing pressure to make their languages, religions, knowledge, arts and oral traditions and other aspects of their lifestyle conform to those of the majority social groups around them. However, we must acknowledge that, despite all these difficulties, the world's indigenous people are not prepared to accept in silence the erosion of their cultures.

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In that respect, we will shortly hear direct from representatives of indigenous people as they express their concerns, make their proposals and list the priorities they would like to see implemented during the Decade. Allow me also to mention how important I believe it is to ensure for these diverse indigenous cultures a framework that would allow them not only to survive but also to blossom.

At the national level, this can be translated as a firm commitment to a multi-ethnic and pluricultural society. History teaches us that cultures do not disappear of and by themselves. Peoples always, in fact, try to preserve as best they can their identities and their particular cultural features.

At the international level, now at a time of increased political and economic cooperation between nations, as seen in high-level meetings such as the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, and the recently concluded General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) trade agreement, it is essential to take account of the fact that many peoples and cultures continue to exist throughout the world while seeking to preserve their integrity and identity.

One of the aims of the United Nations set forth in the Charter is to achieve international cooperation by solving international economic, social, cultural or humanitarian problems and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

In these conditions, the international community and the United Nations in particular are duty-bound to incorporate efforts to protect human diversity into the efforts currently under way to achieve a world consensus on fundamental issues relating to peace, security, development, the environment and human rights.

This is the only way that the human society in which we live today could truly become enriched by the values and diversity of cultures and the forms of social organization of indigenous people.

Before calling on the first speaker in the debate, I should like to propose that the list of speakers in the debate on agenda item 103 be now closed.

It was so decided.

Mr. Staples (Australia): This inauguration of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People reflects a recognition by the United Nations that more effort needs to be made to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples. It is a brutal fact that they have been marginalized to the extent that they are usually the most disadvantaged groups in the societies in which they live. That is a situation which must be addressed by the international community.

Indigenous peoples have suffered dispossession. With few exceptions, they did not participate in designing the constitutional order of the States into which they were incorporated. Nor were they given a voice in the process of decision-making on matters which directly concerned them. They were subjugated to different social, cultural and economic systems. They often suffered expulsion and forced migration, with little or no compensation.

While the work of decolonization undertaken by the United Nations has essentially been completed, the effects of centuries of colonialism have still to be addressed thoroughly and with justice. It is fair to say that at the international level, the rights of indigenous peoples have generally been marginalized. That situation began to change in 1982, with the first meeting of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Since then, indigenous peoples have become increasingly aware of the benefits of working at the international level, and their influence is slowly growing. As today's inauguration demonstrates, their voices are increasingly being heard in the United Nations.

The United Nations is the world focus for the promotion of increased understanding of and respect for their rights. The Decade must be a framework for an on-going process of international action on indigenous issues. The Decade will provide an unprecedented opportunity for the international community to address actively and positively the full range of issues of concern to indigenous peoples. Redressing the dispossession and disadvantage suffered by Australia's indigenous peoples is a major human rights objective of the Australian Government. In an historic statement at the launching in Australia of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, in December 1992, the Australian Prime Minister said that non-indigenous Australians must bear responsibility for the history of violation of the rights of indigenous Australians, for taking their traditional lands and destroying their traditional ways of life, and for practising discrimination and exclusion. Australians are increasingly understanding that there is nothing to fear or to lose in the recognition of this historical truth, or in the extension of social justice and

the broadening of social democracy to include indigenous Australians. Indeed, there is everything to gain.

Australians generally are appreciating more broadly the depth and diversity of aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the contribution they make to enriching our national life and identity.

The Decade's theme is "Indigenous people — partnership in action". The Decade must be based on true partnership, with the aim of fostering new relationships between States and indigenous peoples and between the international community and indigenous peoples. These new relationships must be equitable and based on mutual respect and understanding.

The Australian Government strongly supports the Decade as an opportunity to promote the rights of indigenous peoples and to focus the attention of the international community on their situations. Australia is committed to working with the United Nations and in partnership with indigenous peoples to promote successful outcomes for the Decade both internationally and within Australia. Australia was very pleased to sponsor a draft resolution in the Third Committee on the Decade, and my delegation is particularly pleased to note that that draft resolution was adopted yesterday without a vote and with an increased number of sponsors from all regions of the world.

Australia's national indigenous peoples organization, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, has responsibility for coordination, planning and implementation of Decade activities in Australia.

The success of the Decade in many instances will depend on the contributions and initiatives of the United Nations specialized agencies, the regional commissions and other United Nations organizations. We are pleased to note recent progress towards strengthening inter-agency cooperation on indigenous issues, as reflected in the involvement of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Bank and others in planning joint projects and activities for the Decade. The High Commissioner for Human Rights will have an important role in making coordination effective, as will the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights in his capacity as Coordinator of the Decade. In this context the establishment of an adequately resourced focal unit in the Centre for Human Rights is an urgent priority.

The programme of action for the Decade will enable the international community to address the central issues of concern to indigenous peoples over a more productive period of time than was possible during the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. The programme must be shaped to achieve lasting improvements in their economic, social, cultural and political situations and to enable them to exercise and enjoy their rights more effectively.

A major outcome of the Decade should be the adoption of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. The Decade should also encourage the development of other international standards for the protection and promotion of their human rights, such as those relating to indigenous cultural and intellectual property, the environment and development. Australia believes that the Decade also provides an opportunity for Governments to support the creation of a permanent forum in the United Nations system to address the broad range of issues of concern to them.

The goals, themes and objectives of the Decade must be accompanied by a strong commitment on the part of all Member States to achieving social justice and equity for indigenous peoples throughout the world. We owe it not only to them but also to ourselves to meet the challenge of achieving lasting results during the Decade, of establishing new partnerships and of bringing the dispossessed out of the shadows.

Mrs. Pavall (Norway): On behalf of the Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Norway — I have the honour to congratulate the General Assembly on this memorable day with the opening of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. This is an event that we are very happy to take part in, and we have great expectations as to the results of the Decade.

The Nordic countries see the Decade as a fitting continuation of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, which laid the foundation for raising the world's awareness of indigenous peoples and for bringing indigenous values and rights into focus. The Decade should, in our opinion, mobilize international cooperation in order to improve the social and economic conditions of indigenous peoples and to establish standards which guarantee their human rights. The target

areas of health, education, environment, human rights and development remain priority issues throughout the Decade. This Decade will take place, however, within an ongoing and dynamic process of international political action on indigenous issues, and rather than taking the focus away from that process the Decade should be an instrument to further the interests of the indigenous peoples.

Incidentally, another international Decade will be proclaimed soon: the Decade on Human Rights Education. It is only natural that the two Decades should have a bearing upon each other. Education both about and for indigenous peoples is an essential part of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

The theme suggested for the Decade, "Indigenous people — partnership in action", signals how we all need to cooperate to make this Decade a success. It is neither Governments alone nor indigenous peoples by themselves that can make important changes happen. Governments, indigenous peoples and even non-governmental organizations must be closely involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities during the Decade. The new partnership must also be reflected as an integral part of deliberations and policies throughout the United Nations system as well as in national policies and development-assistance programmes.

Indigenous populations count at least 300 million inhabitants with different backgrounds and living conditions. Local strategies and activities planned for the Decade will therefore be different depending upon the area and the needs of the participants. Internationally, the approach is different, and the Governments of the Nordic countries are grateful for the report, submitted by the Secretary-General, on a comprehensive programme of action for the International Decade. I can assure the Assembly that we have studied the ideas and suggestions it contains with great interest, and we look forward to thorough discussion of the programme of action on the basis of this report.

In this regard, allow me to comment on a few aspects which are of particular importance to us. After the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993 suggested that the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples should be considered, this question was discussed in depth at the twelfth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in July this year. There is a strong interest in continuing this important work. We therefore want to urge Governments to continue to support and to take an active part in this process of consultation. Again, we stress the importance of elaborating the proposal in full partnership with indigenous peoples.

The Nordic countries have on several occasions expressed their commitment to the ongoing work towards drafting a universal declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We are grateful to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, under the able chairmanship of Mrs. Erica-Irene Daes, for having completed its mandate of formulating a draft declarations on the rights of indigenous peoples. The draft declaration is now before the Commission on Human Rights. We urge Governments to adopt a constructive role in the discussion of that draft. It is also of utmost importance to our Governments that indigenous peoples should be able to make substantive contributions to the Commission's consideration of the draft declaration. The consideration of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples should be given high priority by the Commission, with a view to making it possible for the General Assembly to adopt the draft declaration as soon as possible. This Decade should not be allowed to end without the declarations being proclaimed.

Words, however, are not enough. Action must follow, and resources are needed. It is of crucial importance that adequate financial and human resources be provided to support the efforts to be made during the Decade. Contributions may be in the form of support for concrete activities or, as the Norwegian Government has already done, in the form of a substantial contribution to the Voluntary Fund for the Decade. As for the United Nations, we would like to see a much larger portion of the regular budget used on the indigenous sector. It is also essential that the indigenous aspect be included in United Nations activities and operations systemwide. We therefore encourage the Coordinator of the Decade to facilitate the establishment of links between indigenous communities and the United Nations system with a view to integrating the concerns of indigenous peoples in the planning and execution of programmes.

Next year, two important conferences will take place, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, both of which are important also from an indigenous perspective. We therefore sincerely hope that indigenous issues will be included as part of the ongoing preparations for the two conferences.

Efforts must also be made within the Decade to ensure that indigenous peoples — as one of the most

disadvantaged groups in society — receive the necessary attention in order to bring to the forefront their special development needs within the overall context of development.

Before concluding our statement, I should like to mention the excellent work carried out by the United Nations Goodwill Ambassador, Ms. Rigoberta Menchu Tum, and the important experience we have gained through her efforts. This is experience which is valuable and should be drawn upon in the further planning for the Decade.

Finally, it is our sincere hope that the beginning of the International Decade for the World's Indigenous People will provide a new point of departure for the promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as for the process of building confidence and justice.

Mr. Keating (New Zealand): Today we celebrate the beginning of an International Decade with a unique character. This Decade is an opportunity to acknowledge the status of indigenous people in their respective countries. The Decade is directed at making an effective and ongoing contribution towards the solution of the problems that face indigenous people in many parts of the world. New Zealand strongly supports the aims of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. We are confident that the invaluable opportunity provided by the Decade's institution for progress in the areas identified by the United Nations in 1993 will yield fruit.

Mr. Blandino Canto (Dominican Republic), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Work has already begun to promote greater awareness of the interests of indigenous people and to try to develop solutions to their difficulties in these areas — human rights, the environment, development, education and health. Achievements in the International Year of the World's Indigenous People provided a basis for further action and progress, at both the international and the national levels.

The enjoinder to us all underlying the United Nations proclamation is that the Decade must move forward from here. This is a process which New Zealand wholeheartedly supports. We will participate fully in encouraging and trying to facilitate the achievement of the Decade's aims and look to other States to do likewise.

In order to ensure that all the effort put into the Decade will bear concrete results, the New Zealand Government emphasizes that the Programme of Activities developed for the Decade must be focused and action-oriented. Careful consideration of the activities to be included is necessary, so as to produce a well-supported plan. We welcome the work done so far on the development of a Programme of Activities, at the Technical Meeting in Geneva in July, and since then by Mrs. Daes and the Secretary-General. We also endorse the proposal to hold a second technical meeting on the Decade in 1995 to help finalize planning for the Decade.

Clearly, many people and agencies have a vital role to play in designing and putting into action the programmes which will give the Decade its worth, recognizing that indigenous people must themselves be given the opportunity to play a key part in these processes. It is important therefore that measures be taken to facilitate their active involvement in projects at both the planning and execution stages.

New Zealand also believes that an objective of the Decade should be to promote increased cooperation between indigenous people, so as to increase their own effective role in the resolution of the problems facing them. Governments are encouraged to work with indigenous people in a spirit of partnership. To achieve sustained progress towards the achievement of the Decade's goals, we believe it is important that appropriate domestic activities reflect the needs and aspirations of the indigenous people of each country. In New Zealand, the focus for the first year of the Decade will be the Year of the Maori language, *Te Tau o Te Reo Maori*. This underlines the importance attached to the language as a vital part of the identity and culture of Maori.

New Zealand particularly encourages the agencies of the United Nations to take action, putting into effect the United Nations commitment to the aims of the Decade. We welcome the attention given in the Secretary-General's preliminary report (A/49/444) on a comprehensive programme of action for the Decade as to how this can be done.

An important step towards increasing information flows about the situation of indigenous people can certainly be taken by collecting statistical data. New Zealand also encourages the designation of focal points on indigenous issues within the specialized agencies and the development institutions, as was requested by the United Nations resolution on the Decade last year.

New Zealand also welcomes the report's suggestions of ways in which particular agencies can involve themselves in the Decade. The key issue is really for agencies to take action on indigenous issues as part of their core activities, recognizing that such issues have an important place in their mainstream work and according them appropriate priority.

Agencies could also provide a valuable focus for financial and other forms of support for the Decade by taking the lead in coordinating work on particular objectives. We welcome preliminary work on coordination and planning that has already been done in recent inter-agency contacts, and we look forward to continuing progress in this area.

Next, New Zealand would like to reiterate its strong support for the strengthening of the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat and for the establishment, within the Centre, of a unit focused on indigenous issues. The international developments currently taking place in the field of indigenous rights and the need for suitable support during the running of the Decade greatly enhance the need for the allocation of appropriate resources in this area. Among the international developments referred to there is the question of establishing within the United Nations system a permanent forum for indigenous people. With the launching of the Decade, it is particularly timely to give consideration to the establishment of such a forum.

It is appropriate also to begin to focus on the upcoming consideration of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. New Zealand looks forward to the fifty-first session of the Commission on Human Rights, at the beginning of next year. We expect that on that occasion a suitable mechanism for Governments' discussion of the draft will be decided upon.

New Zealand urges that consideration be given to ensuring appropriate access for indigenous people to the agreed process. The New Zealand Government considers this to be integral to the nature of the document and to be a natural step along the path towards the eventual adoption of a suitable declaration.

New Zealand is a long-standing proponent of the development and adoption of an appropriate declaration that recognizes the right of indigenous people to greater involvement in the determination of their economic and social destiny. We encourage States to give their attention to ensuring progress on the draft, and we hope that the adoption of a final text will, without fail, take place in good time within the Decade.

As was mentioned earlier, New Zealand believes that the success of the Decade will depend to a great extent upon the further development of partnerships — successfully demonstrated — between Governments and indigenous people during the International Year of Indigenous People. We now need to build on that and to use the opportunity of a longer time-frame to work for further progress towards the solution of problems faced by indigenous people.

As we participate in this important international initiative, we shall also continue our efforts domestically and in discussion with Maori to ensure that their rights and concerns are accorded special attention, consistent with the founding document of our country, the Treaty of Waitangi.

New Zealand has a range of mechanisms and policies that recognize the distinct place of Maori in our society. Furthermore, the New Zealand Government will continue to promote awareness and understanding of Maori culture and language, as evidenced by the decision to mark the first year of the Decade as the Year of Maori Language. It will continue to promote development opportunities for Maori and improvement in the delivery of social services to Maori.

But the New Zealand Government will also continue to work actively to try to find solutions to the remaining difficulties. It is timely, in this regard, to mention that the New Zealand Government's policy proposals for resolving Maori grievances under the Treaty of Waitangi were released yesterday. This marks the beginning of an in-depth process of consultation with Maori to ensure that their views of the proposals are considered before the policies are finalized. The Government wishes to achieve settlements of Maori grievances that are fair, achievable and durable. The process will be a challenging one, but it is none the less critical to achieving progress on the settlement of Treaty grievances.

The Decade provides the mechanism for all to act together to strengthen international cooperation in working towards solutions to the problems faced by indigenous people throughout the world. New Zealand therefore calls again upon Governments, the United Nations and its agencies and organizations, intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies and the non-indigenous nationals of all States to recognize fully

the status of indigenous people and to convert their partnership with indigenous people into positive action throughout the next 10 years and thereafter.

Mr. Goodleaf (Canada): Canada welcomes the opportunity to speak on this occasion to mark the beginning of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. As the first and only aboriginal person to have been appointed at the rank of Deputy Minister in Canada, I am particularly proud to represent Canada in joining the international community in its tribute to the world's indigenous people.

The Decade honours indigenous people from around the world whose contributions, big and small, bring richness and vitality to our global community. Its proclamation is a testament to the efforts and contributions of many individuals and organizations over the years. We should like to express our recognition of the work of individuals like the goodwill Ambassador, Ms. Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Mrs. Erica-Irene Daes and the other members of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

Canada is no stranger to this Assembly. Its commitment to the values of the United Nations can be measured daily, and its commitment to international cooperation stands as the hallmark of our partnerships with other nations. Canada stands again before representatives herewith equal determination to ensure that the goals set for the Decade we celebrate are achieved.

Canada took pride in being one of the sponsors of the draft resolution that sets out guiding principles, priorities and directions for action during the Decade, as well as a framework for international cooperation. We call on Governments and, in particular, on the Secretary-General and the United Nations system to work together, in cooperation with indigenous people around the world, to give substance to our commitments.

In our view, the United Nations system will play an important role in determining the success of the Decade. We welcome the appointment of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights as Coordinator for the Decade and the Secretary-General's preliminary report on a comprehensive programme of activities. We want to highlight the fact that the report recognizes that consultation and cooperation with indigenous people must be a guiding principle. We are encouraged by the Secretary-General's intention to provide additional resources from within the regular budget of the United Nations to strengthen the work of the Coordinator and the Centre for Human Rights.

We recognize the significant role of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system in planning and implementing activities for the Decade. We commend those agencies that are considering ways to increase their efforts to take special account, in their budgeting and programming, of the needs of indigenous people. We note the interest of the United Nations Development Programme in the promotion of indigenous partnership, trade and development. We urge the Coordinator and agencies to continue their collaboration and to seek innovative, creative ways to involve indigenous people and organizations in their activities.

We look forward to the submission of a final comprehensive programme of action to the General Assembly at it fiftieth session, and we are prepared to take part in the future meetings for planning and reviewing the Decade.

There are many other ongoing and interrelated activities at the domestic, regional and international levels which can be brought together and advanced under the unifying goal and theme of the Decade. Of special importance to Canada is the progress of the draft declaration on indigenous rights through the United Nations system. At the next session of the Commission on Human Rights to consider the draft declaration, ensuring that the process provides for the most effective participation of indigenous representatives must be a priority. We are committed to working with States Members of the United Nations, as well as with the representatives of indigenous people from Canada and around the world, to adopt the declaration during the Decade. In Canada we are seeking the views of other Governments, aboriginal organizations and other potential partners on objectives and plans we will pursue during the Decade.

We are all very much aware that further changes are needed if challenges faced by aboriginal people in all countries are to be overcome. In Canada much has been accomplished, and much is under way to deal with aboriginal issues in ways reflecting the partnership in action. Canada's general aboriginal policy follows two broad themes: building a new relationship based on trust, mutual respect and aboriginal participation in decision-making, and strengthening aboriginal communities through initiatives designed to build stronger, healthier and more self-reliant communities.

The Government of Canada is prepared to act on the premise that aboriginal people in Canada possess the inherent right of self-government and that that right exists within the Canadian Constitution. Canada is committed to making aboriginal self-government a practical reality, in partnership with aboriginal people, other Governments in Canada and Canadians. Giving effect to that inherent right will require significant changes to existing arrangements, and discussions have been held on how this might be accomplished.

Yesterday the Government of Canada announced an unprecedented and comprehensive agreement that will fundamentally change the relationship between Canada and the First Nations in the Province of Manitoba. The agreement sets out a framework for transferring authority and accountability into the hands of the Province's First Nation leaders.

As a result of other negotiations between aboriginal groups and Governments, land-claim settlements have now been reached across the Canadian Arctic and elsewhere. They provide the means for claims beneficiaries to preserve their traditional way of life while participating fully in modern economic-development opportunities. In some cases they are related to new Government structures, such as the creation of Canada's third territory, Nunavut, by 1999.

I would like to highlight a few other initiatives which also relate closely to the United Nations goal for the International Decade. In the area of health, a comprehensive policy is being developed with national aboriginal organizations, designed to address the health and social problems facing aboriginal people. In education, there are new initiatives at all levels, from head-start programmes for pre-school children to expanded funding for post-secondary education. In 1970 there were approximately 800 students pursuing post-secondary education; today we have more than 21,000.

Changes are being achieved in other ways as well. Aboriginal people are moving to the forefront of Canadian life in business and commerce, culture and the arts, educational endeavours, public service, law, medicine and so forth. National aboriginal achievement awards have started to give special recognition to these individuals.

Canada's first Arctic Ambassador, Mary Simon, is well-known to many here for her activities, particularly on behalf of the Inuit. At the inauguration of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People she spoke on behalf of indigenous groups.

The International Decade presents us all with a unique and exciting opportunity. It should inspire us to look ahead and consider what objectives we might set, what plans we might make, what goals we might reach — domestically and in cooperation with partners in other countries in the United Nations system — and, equally important, with indigenous peoples.

Mr. Duchicela (Ecuador) (*interpretation from Spanish*): In August of 1533, on the death of Atahualpa, the last ruling Inca of the Tahuantisuyo, one of the wise men of the Empire declared in profound sorrow and despair, "*Chaupi Punllapi tutayarca*" — "It became night in the middle of the day." Few phrases manage to summarize with such clarity and vision the fate suffered by the Indians of my country since the Spanish invasion. It is a phrase that can be applied just as accurately to the fate of almost all the indigenous peoples of the world under ruthless subjugation by foreign colonial Powers, mestizo social elites, Creole Governments and the civil societies of our own countries that, entranced by the idea of "modernity", are losing their own identities, values and history and, consequently, their ability to move into the future with unity, creativity and dignity.

In order for our countries to emerge from underdevelopment, we must eliminate our profound internal social, economic and cultural differences. We must also recognize the relevance of our Indian heritage and banish any trace of discrimination against indigenous cultures and their subordination to so-called Western culture.

Since its inception the United Nations has shown the world what can be achieved when dialogue, concertation and negotiation are used as mechanisms to resolve the many differences that naturally arise between the countries of the world. Its contribution towards the achievement of world peace and respect for human rights and its invaluable support for our peoples' achievement of social and economic development in today's world are unquestionable.

My country, Ecuador, resolutely supports the United Nations Charter of principles, fulfils United Nations resolutions and agreements and considers that the United Nations makes an invaluable contribution towards the realization of our national aspirations in an international context of ever greater complexity.

It is with satisfaction and pride that we are witnessing one of the most illustrious periods in human history, characterized by the vigorous presence of the world's indigenous peoples in the world order. The faith and dynamism of indigenous peoples' organizational and creative process, springing from our roots and cultural identity, have enabled us to coexist and find new ways to consolidate our existence as peoples.

Our peoples — from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, including the indigenous peoples of Canada and the United States, the descendants of the Mayas, Aztecs, Kunas, Wayuus, Quichuas, Aymaras, Tupis and Guaranis and the peoples of the Amazon and the Caribbean nations — have had to overcome many obstacles in order to finally find each other again and envisage, like brothers, a common destiny.

After an arduous journey we indigenous peoples of this and other continents have consolidated our brotherhood and defined strategies enabling us to struggle together against inequality and injustice. The unity of indigenous peoples is no longer the patrimony only of its sons and daughters; rather, it is becoming a legacy for all the peoples of the world in this time of conflict and violence, which, regrettably, persist in some parts of the world.

In spite of this encouraging vision of brotherhood and unity, the global situation of the indigenous peoples of the world continues to be critical, and the well-being of the indigenous population is at risk, especially as regards women and children.

Reports from international organizations, including the United Nations, indicate that indigenous populations are plunged into extreme poverty and plagued by ancient problems — lack of education, of housing and health, the deterioration of the environment, lack of jobs and diversified technology, lack of material and financial resources, the negative impact of the irrational use of renewable and non-renewable natural resources, the theft of intellectual, scientific and technological property which, far from contributing to their own development and well-being, in fact is used to serve political and economic interest groups.

International organizations and national Governments must now maximize their efforts and modify their practices in order to increase the technical and financial resources available to support the integral development of indigenous peoples with broad respect for their principles and cultural identity. In this connection it is imperative to bring about a radical change in attitudes that can allow us to put behind us that shameful assertion to the effect that investment in the development of indigenous peoples does not bear fruit. Instead, we must today go forward towards a greater and more decisive investment of resources and technology so that the indigenous peoples can consolidate their presence in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres.

These efforts cannot but facilitate harmonious development for the indigenous peoples and for mankind as a whole. Lack of action would be to perpetuate the poverty and unjust relationships that can jeopardize world peace.

The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People declared by the United Nations should be seen as universal recognition of the indigenous people for their invaluable efforts to protect and preserve the resources of mankind and to make the world livable. In addition, however, the Decade should provide an opportunity for all nations of the world to establish a new internal procedure designed to invigorate and develop the creative energy, thought and action of their peoples, their Governments and their institutions in order to take into account the indigenous peoples as vital components of their own existence.

Following the solemn declaration of the Decade, which in itself will mark a permanent milestone on the path to human dignity, we must henceforward put into practice these renewed and newly undertaken principles of action that the Decade demands and that will give body and spirit to the new strategies and policies of international organizations, national Governments and our own civil societies. Such changes in principles and attitudes will determine to a great extent the present and future of our countries and the fate of the indigenous populations of the world in general.

My country is fortunate in having had for over 20 years now a vigorous indigenous movement, highly organized and with a clear, peaceful vision and deep faith in the potential of our peoples. Similarly, the indigenous peoples of Ecuador, although generally ignored and left outside the mainstream of development, have managed not only to survive but to grow and to become stronger within the constraints of such critical conditions of life.

My country has begun to understand that, in order to attain social and economic development for the Ecuadorian population as a whole, it is indispensable and

urgent that the indigenous peoples participate actively in our contemporary society. Our Government, under the leadership of President Sixto Duran-Ballen, has initiated a series of actions that have this objective in mind.

One of these actions was the creation in May of this year of the National Secretariat for Indigenous Affairs and Ethnic Minorities, over which I am proud to preside. The Secretariat's main objectives are: first, to plan and coordinate all Government action on behalf of the indigenous communities; secondly, to promote social and economical projects in those communities; and, thirdly, to revitalize the indigenous cultures within the broader framework of Ecuador's intercultural development.

It would be illusory to believe that after so many years of neglect and inattention on the part of earlier Governments and civil society in general, we can, from one day to another, resolve all of the acute problems facing the indigenous population. But what we do believe we can do is initiate an irreversible process of development based on dialogue, on a deep understanding of the aspirations of the indigenous peoples, on the strengthening of their organizations and on continuing support of any sound initiative, regardless of its source, that may improve the living conditions of our brothers and sisters.

The Government of President Duran-Ballen wants to establish a philosophy of responsibility, a commitment to work and honesty in our relationship with the indigenous peoples. We want to do away with the empty speeches, political manipulation and false hopes that traditional politicians in Ecuador have used, mainly as part of their electoral tactics towards the indigenous population.

Nevertheless, the road ahead will be long and complicated. The indigenous peoples in my country daily face many situations that threaten their survival and well-being as individuals and as peoples. Extreme poverty in Ecuador exists mainly among the indigenous and black populations.

The worst indicators regarding health, nutrition, literacy, environmental damage, lack of jobs, infant mortality, school drop-out rate and migration to the cities are all to be found mainly among the indigenous and black populations of the country.

As if this were not enough, the cultural alienation that we suffer, the scant attention given to indigenous and Afro-Equatorial cultures, the disdain for native languages and cultural values, are all serious threats that my people confront on a daily basis.

How do we begin to change this sad state of affairs? What must we do to bring these unquestionable facts home to Governments, civil society and international organizations so that they may gain awareness and thereby adopt the necessary decisions allowing us to begin, once and for all, to tackle these problems with determination and forcefulness? How do we ensure that the development strategies based on international cooperation and free trade can also take into account the situation of the indigenous peoples?

In the face of such a complex situation, which involves a high risk for the indigenous population, it could not be more timely for the United Nations to declare a Decade to benefit the indigenous peoples of the world. My country welcomes that decision and congratulates all who have worked to bring it about, especially the Goodwill Ambassador for the International Year, Ms. Rigoberta Menchú Tum.

In light of all this, from this high international forum and as a son of the Quechua People of the South American Andes, I make a profound and fraternal appeal that we inaugurate a new historic period for all mankind, in which the indigenous peoples of the world will assume an active role in the decision-making process on matters directly affecting their own fate as well as that of humanity as a whole. Let us put behind us the dark pages of our history; let us learn from the lessons of the past and not under any circumstances make the same mistakes again; let us have faith in our own energies and direct them towards achieving well-being, especially of women and children in the indigenous populations; let us thus embrace justice and equality for all.

We will then enter into the next millennium with great optimism, and this Decade will mark the beginning of a century of hope to which the indigenous peoples of the Americas and of other continents want to contribute, with all our efforts and with whatever sacrifice may be required, for the benefit of all our people and to contribute to the shaping of a world of equal rights for all.

The world must know that we the indigenous peoples are not willing to tolerate one more day of neglect, deceit and lack of respect for our identity, values, history and dignity. We will fight from every trench, peacefully, using our intelligence and our unity.

Like the brothers and sisters that we are, we will help each other and strengthen our potential through the exchange of experiences. We will welcome among us all the white and mestizo brothers and sisters who believe in our cause. We will propel our countries' economies. To fight corruption, we will establish a new ethical code that draws directly from the ancient indigenous morality. We will preserve our work ethic and our love for the land and nature and for human solidarity. We will give the world our spirit, simple but noble, our happiness, our trust and our tenderness. We will ask Pachacamac, the Great Spirit who has received the souls of Rumiñahui, Gerónimo, Caupolicán, Túpac-Amaru and all of our ancestors, to be with us always, so that those words that Dolores Cacoango, from Cayambe, Ecuador, spoke more than 50 years ago may come true:

> "We the Indians are like the hay that grows on the highlands of the Andes: the more it is cut the more it grows back, and even higher than before. Thus, like the hay, we will populate the world".

Mr. Camacho Omiste (Bolivia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Bolivia welcomes the opening of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. The indigenous peoples, estimated to number over 300 million, are a significant component of the international community. That is why the United Nations has been promoting the development of international rules to govern the recognition of the rights of those peoples of such varied cultural backgrounds. Of course, it will be necessary to do much more to end all forms of discrimination against and marginalization of these peoples. In the meantime, some international provisions are of particular importance, such as the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169, which constitutes an authentic model on this subject. There are other resolutions of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and various agencies which are worthy of mention and which are being introduced into the national legislation of some States.

The special relationship of indigenous peoples with the land is of vital importance. That is why the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development points out that indigenous peoples and their communities have a vital role to play in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. The Declaration also includes the principle that States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.

The designation of 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People gave the world community the impetus to examine the current situation, increase its awareness of this subject and show its determination to support the indigenous peoples not only by recognizing their rights but also by solving the problems they face.

Bolivia is a multiethnic and multicultural State. This is proclaimed in the State Political Constitution. The constitutional reform adopted this year through our new Article 171 states that in Bolivia:

> "The social, economic and cultural rights of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the national territory are recognized, respected and protected within the framework of the law, especially those rights relating to their traditional community lands, and the use and sustainable management of the natural resources and their identity, values, languages, customs and institutions are guaranteed."

As President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada said in his statement to the General Assembly, in Bolivia participation is no longer a mere word. We are proud that today, after 500 years, an indigenous, intellectual Aymara, Victor Hugo Cárdenas, is Vice-President of the Republic. This fact reflects, more than any words could do, the change we are promoting — a change with an order and order with change, so that the majorities which have hitherto been segregated can gain access to power through the ballot box and not through violence, and so that change can take place in democracy and not against it.

The Law of Participation by the People, which was also adopted this year, promotes and consolidates the presence of rural and urban indigenous communities in the political and economic life of the country. It also recognizes the representatives of grass-roots territorial organizations, designated in accordance with their practices, customs and statutory provisions.

Moreover, the educational reform now under way will ensure that in Bolivia children learn to read in their mother tongue, thereby respecting the multicultural and multiethnic nature of our society. On the basis of this reform, the children of our Aymara, Quechua, Guaraní and Amazonian peoples will learn to read in their own languages and only after that will learn to speak, read and write in Spanish and other languages. In other words, this process will respect and strengthen their identity

while preparing our people for better participation in the modern world.

The aforementioned legal instruments constitute real milestones in the history of Bolivia, which is determined to make its representative democracy an increasingly participatory process.

As an advance tribute to the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, the Government of Bolivia convinced a meeting of representatives of Latin American Governments, grass-roots peasant organizations and international and cooperation agencies, in the city of Cochabamba in June.

Mrs. Rigoberta Menchú Tum was asked to prepare a document, to serve as a basis for the meeting, that would reflect the basic elements which, from her experience, could become common proposals of the Governments and indigenous peoples of the region. The meeting framed a series of recommendations to be included in the strategy of the Decade. Those recommendations were brought to the attention of Governments and the United Nations system. In this connection, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bolivia, Antonio Araníbar Quiroga, in his statement to the General Assembly in September, repeated that:

> "My country is confident that the observance of this Decade will be not merely symbolic, but essentially a practical and concrete endeavour in its objectives and its scope." *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Plenary Meetings, 9th meeting, p. 27)*

The Programme of Action for the Decade must be oriented towards establishing a new type of relationship with the indigenous peoples ensuring recognition of their identity and of their historic rights, as well as ensuring respect for their institutions and guaranteeing their participation in all aspects of society and, in particular, as regards questions of concern to them.

In response to these requests, the organs of the United Nations and its specialized agencies should take the initiative to see to it that, in the regular and special budgets as well as in extra-budgetary funds, the needed resources are allocated for the implementation of the activities of the decade.

In this connection, I wish to inform the Assembly that at the regional level and by decision of the Heads of State or Government of the Ibero-American countries, the Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean has been established, with headquarters in La Paz, Bolivia. We are also pleased to inform the Assembly that the Fund is in force thanks to the ratification of the Constituent Agreement by a growing number of States, including Mexico, Peru, Panama, Ecuador, Paraguay, Spain and Bolivia. We are certain that in the near future the Fund will be strengthened institutionally and that it will play an outstanding role in the implementation of the tasks for which it was established, in the certainty that it will contribute effectively to the success of the Decade that we inaugurate today.

The Government of Bolivia congratulates the General Assembly on the proclamation of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and appeals to the Governments of Member States, in cooperation with the indigenous populations, to contribute resolutely to the success of the activities to be conducted during the Decade.

Mr. Flores Olea (Mexico) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: Mexico is proud of its indigenous past and recognizes that its history, its culture and its institutions are also the product of its indigenous roots, of that great tradition which is not always recognized and which, none the less, shapes us, our identity, our lives and our personality.

Of course, Mexico has always recognized its mestizo nature — the fact that we are the product of two sources which, in many senses, complemented each other and resulted in a new culture and a new personality. None the less it cannot be denied that, in spite of the indigenous cultural roots that today define our personality in the political, economic and social areas, the indigenous peoples of Mexico have often been left out and marginalized, far from the decision-making centres and the focal points of development.

This must be stated with the utmost sincerity because it forms the necessary basis and the vital ethical attitude necessary for corrective action to be taken, for a broad programme to be initiated that not only recognizes the rights of the indigenous populations but is also able to open up new opportunities for them — real choices for life and development.

As it has almost always been the case in the history of our peoples, in Mexico we have, in varying degrees according to the times, encountered: hostility,

subordination and ignorance coexisting with recognition of cultural greatness, of the virtues of tradition and of the value of the distinct personality of the indigenous peoples.

In any event, at the constitutional level, we in Mexico today recognize the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of the country and, hence, the dignity of the indigenous peoples. For a number of reasons, this is clearly a time of understanding and of appreciation of the indigenous populations. Among them, we cannot ignore the incredible developments in the media which, above and beyond the uniformity of values they produce, also stimulate contacts, spread knowledge and promote interplay among cultures. Mention must also be made of the intensification of migrations and of the crumbling of the bipolar world, which had led to the coercion of peoples and the standardization of their aspirations and cultures.

Recognition of the plurality of cultures and of the legitimacy and dignity of all cultures as a mark of civilization should be universally accepted today. Unfortunately, we are also living in a time of contradiction: the universality of contacts among peoples and cultures — the creative diversity and the spiritual richness generated by shared experiences — is now being sorely tested in outbreaks of racism and xenophobia. We must also recognize that in virtually all parts of the world the indigenous populations comprise the poorest groups and, almost always, groups in abject poverty. Therefore, the struggle against poverty is also the struggle for the well-being of indigenous populations.

The Government of Mexico is aware that priority attention to indigenous problems is an essential element in the present and future stability of countries. We wish to reiterate that understanding and negotiation are the only viable means of resolving the complex situation of the indigenous peoples. In the specific case of Mexico, the Government has reaffirmed its commitment to a homeland of peace, with its desire to establish a nation of equity - a Mexico with justice for all. Hence, we reiterate our readiness to redouble our efforts to achieve concerted solutions without violence — solutions based on harmony, democracy and opportunities for equitable development.

The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People presupposes first and foremost a recognition of the plurality and diversity of cultures and, even more, recognition of their dignity, of their own irreplaceable values. It also presupposes recognition of the rights of the indigenous peoples as individual human rights but also as collective rights and as social rights.

This means the recognition and acceptance of the ability of the indigenous peoples to preserve their values and their traditions, including the ability to preserve their own forms of social organization.

The delegation of Mexico has already made specific comments in the Third Committee of the General Assembly on the draft programme of action for the Decade. We wish nonetheless to reiterate the importance of having the Decade celebrated in national, regional and international spheres through specific activities that will be of tangible benefit to the indigenous people of the world.

We believe that it is important that the Programme of Action for the Decade should incorporate certain fundamental themes related to the development of the indigenous people, international cooperation to support such development, the granting of resources and the financing of development projects that are formulated by indigenous people themselves. Likewise, we believe the themes of the Decade should be biennial and should focus on the topics identified in General Assembly resolution 48/163, namely, human rights, the environment, development, education and health.

Mexico will pay particular attention to the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system and to their participation in the different working groups. This is a real demand on the part of the indigenous people, a demand, which must be met. For this reason, Mexico is in favour of establishing such a permanent forum in which indigenous representatives of all the regions of the world will be able to participate and express their views. There is no doubt that the participation of indigenous people in the activities of the United Nations will significantly strengthen our Organization.

The launching of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People is a positive political sign, one which recognizes the need to establish a new relationship with our indigenous people. Today undoubtedly heralds a historic event for our Organization. It means the fulfilment of an important longing and constitute an act of justice for millions of indigenous people who, in many parts of the world, are victims largely of poverty, marginalization and oppression. The delegation of Mexico firmly supports the proclamation of this Decade and its Programme of Action and expresses its hope that these will contribute in a significant way to

the improvement of the situation of indigenous peoples the world over.

Mr. López Pulecio (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): In the beginning, we were all indigenous people. Then, at the borders of the ancient kingdoms the conquerors appeared with their great ships and their arrogance, their invincible weapons and their all-powerful gods. Ancient civilizations of stone that believed their time had come, crumbled, stupefied before the white man.

Then, we were no longer all indigenous peoples, because that nature which so intimately revealed the truth of our roots was reduced to a form of marginalization, discrimination, servitude. The descendants of the great princes became slaves, vassals of the plough. They were forced increasingly into the least productive lands, socially chastized for their obstinate desire to cling to practices that were those of a conquered people, exploited mercilessly. "On the back of an Indian" was an expression used in Colombia in colonial days when the natives were used as means of transportation to cross the impossible mountain paths. And they were always in a subordinate position, never coming of age, considered unable to assume the supreme virtues of the civilization that had conquered them.

Thus was consummated what may perhaps be the greatest act of genocide in history, the genocide of the aboriginal peoples of Asia, Africa and America in the process of building the empires of today.

Centuries have passed since then and the world has begun to turn its gaze to those survivors who are clinging like victims of a shipwreck to what remains of their possessions. In spite of centuries of domination, a domination that still exists in many places they have the wisdom to preserve what is theirs.

And what is theirs is vast and very beautiful. The modern world has at last understood that the sacred nature of the relationship between man and the Earth is essential to the survival of humanity. The most sophisticated cultures can learn a great lesson from the indigenous communities, who have preserved intact the small world left to them by the conquest, a world where one can still detect the colonizers of today standing with laws and guns in their ambitious hands.

If there is anyone to whom modern society, countries and the international community have a social debt to pay, it is the indigenous communities. What has been done in recent years to recognize and protect their values, their practices, their creations, their language, their beliefs and their land, is no more than a partial payment of that enormous debt.

The purpose of this endeavour must be to include indigenous communities in the full enjoyment of the rights and obligations that any national of a State has, with respect for their cultural identity and within the framework of a careful policy of protecting what in the past attempts were made to destroy so cruelly.

The Government of Colombia has supported and enthusiastically continues to support the celebration of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People as a United Nations programme which can draw attention to a forgotten world and which can emphasize the fundamental equality of that world and its right to raise its voice before the international community in defence of what belongs to it.

The Government of Colombia has pursued a policy of strengthening its indigenous communities and an ongoing process of recognizing their special importance in the life of Colombia, where nearly 80 indigenous ethnic groups comprise a population of over a million persons: one out of 33 Colombians is an indigenous person. These communities achieved major political representation and participation through the new political Constitution adopted in 1991 and through the broad process of indigenous organization and mobilization that began more than 25 years ago.

In the Constitution significant progress was made in recognizing the legal, social and political equality of all the country's cultures. That equality is the backbone of our new constitutional norms. Article 7 of the Constitution decrees that

> "The State recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation",

and article 8 recognizes that

> "It is the obligation of the State and of persons to protect the cultural and natural wealth of the nation".

Article 70 stipulates that

> "The State has the duty to promote and encourage access to culture by all Colombians through equal

opportunities, ongoing education and scientific, technical, artistic and professional training during all stages of creating a national identity.

"Culture in all its manifestations is the foundation of nationhood. The State recognizes the equality and dignity of all who live in the country. The State shall promote research, science, development and the dissemination of the nation's cultural values".

Article 10 of the Constitution, while declaring Spanish to be the official language of Colombia, establishes that

"the languages and dialects of ethnic groups are also official on their territories. Teaching in communities with their own linguistic traditions shall be bilingual".

Finally, articles 230 and 246 recognize the political and legal autonomy of indigenous communities, which shall be exercised in conformity with their practices and customs, so long as these do not contradict the Constitution or the law.

Another pillar of Colombia's policy on indigenous peoples is our ratification, through Law 21 of 1991, of the International Labour Organisation Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries, which consecrates respect for their culture, religion, social structure and customary law and for the right of indigenous peoples to participate jointly with the State in programmes relating to their own development.

The President returned to the Chair.

My country has the political will to ensure that these laws are reflected in effective measures to assist and protect indigenous ethnic groups. The programme of the Government of President Ernesto Samper known as the "social leap forward" is aimed at improving living standards for the poorest, most vulnerable, most isolated, least educated groups, including the indigenous population.

In connection with the activities of the Decade, Colombia participated in the regional preparatory meeting held at Cochabamba, Bolivia, where recommendations were developed for Latin American and Caribbean Governments to give concrete form to the Decade. Those proposals have been submitted to Governments for their comments and observations with a view to consolidating an official regional proposal.

We also participated in the July 1994 meeting held to draw conclusions from the activities of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People and to formulate a plan of action and a plan for financing the International Decade. At that meeting, a report was submitted on policies developed for participation and cooperation between the State and indigenous organizations. This enabled us to set up the National Council for Indigenous Policy, the Committee on Indigenous Human Rights, regional and local inter-institutional coordination committees, the Mining Oversight Council, and national committees on health and education. Through those bodies, indigenous people can state their problems, and joint solutions can be sought.

It is worth noting our work to define and put in place procedures for demarcating indigenous territorial entities, which will form part of the Colombian State's administrative political structure. Today in Colombia, more than 26 million hectares are protected as indigenous preserves.

One day, in one of those preserves, in Colombia's Andes mountains, which the Spanish conquest never reached, the earth cried out with the roar of a thousand wild beasts, and the remote, miserably poor, sacred land of the Paeces crumbled in an avalanche that was the climax of centuries of abandonment. The victims of that tragedy appeared on the shores of civilization and gained the kind of attention they had never had. What they were given was poor compensation for what they had lost: their land.

My country's indigenous Paeca people do not need new land; they need their own land, because in their world view the land does not belong the Paecas, but the Paecas to the land. Their gods, their ancestors and life itself come from the land. They believe that felling the trees will bring down the heavens.

How can our comfortable civilization come closer to them without violating the very essence of their spirit and their culture? How can we learn from their age-old wisdom, by which they survived centuries of domination, in their own environment — with the time, as the brave Kuna warriors of the Colombian Amazon were supposed to have said, to listen to their own hearts? No harm came to them and they were not drawn into the consumer society, with all its anguish.

Indigenous tribes are the poorest communities of the countries in which they live, but they are certainly not

the least wise. Are our values superior to theirs? Is our world view richer? Might we not learn from their way of approaching the world as a blessing of the gods rather than a commodity for mass consumption?

At last we have a splendid opportunity for genuine dialogue between civilizations, which is possible only on the basis of equality among the interlocutors.

Neither in Latin America nor anywhere else in the world are there people whose rights have been more violated, whose communities have been more dispersed, whose cultures have been more casually destroyed than the indigenous populations. Those who remain are the survivors of innumerable conquests. Our world owes each of them an enormous debt. The amount of that debt is measured in the steady plundering of what is most valuable to them: their bond with their own world, which must be restored through an educational process that can inform them about their values and can guarantee them a place on the earth to which they belong, where they can worship their gods with the dignity of free human beings. Perhaps then we can all be indigenous peoples again, as we were in the beginning.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.